

*The
Gleaner
1997-98*



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The Gleaner

1997-1998

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A Traveler by Twilight

Such nights as these! Such nights as these!
Gazing into remnants of some Autumn storm,
Born of Atlantic calm,
Lightning embraces the whipping course,
Of jagged-drawn winds, intensity equal to pride borne,
Slandered remembrance of a fiery kiss,
Passion raging, all consuming,
Resolution strengthens the quailing heart,
While sheltering blackness and watery curtain
Hide the flowing tears shed.
I, alone, standing, a sentinel,
Guarding the secrets regarding Hell;
Lucifer contriving to banish hope,
With misery wrought of tumult, ebbing the tide of human
spirits
On such a night as this!

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Such nights as these! Such nights as these!
The stillness overwhelming, listening,
As one feathery messenger of Heaven falls to join
Its companions on the quilted ground,
Streetlamp glare is hushed,
Harsh lines softened by inches of white,
The wind a whisper, seeking to cover,
Line of footsteps, unbroken but scattered,
As if host were unsure whither to next travel,
Frolicking, jumping, and falling, while shadows
Drown in royal
Etch the smooth, velvety cover of snow,
And I alone, in respite.
Some madness, some unknown joy,
Hath crept into the creator of that line,
Leading straight to the bearer of my lifting heart,
While frosty beauty spills everywhere
On such a night as this!

Such nights as these! Such nights as these!
Late unto morning, stars have winked out,
Icy cold dew under bare feet mocks the warming ground,
Shimmering in moonlight.
I seem to have lost something here
In chilly April air,
Across the field a newborn filly nuzzles its dam,
Stirring the memory of lost life, a child I never knew,
Taken before its time,
Her spirit etched forever in my soul,
As gold-green leaves lay waiting to burst forth soon, but
not,
On such a night as this!

Such nights as these! Such nights as these!
Storm has ended, mist is rising,
Rain still falling, this night is alive!
As haunted loons cry, and crickets sing,
The fireflies dance, half-hidden in Lake's gauzy shroud,
The ground, its dwellers and its sorry cleansed,
Sends forth a living scent.
I stand alone, left yet once more,
Miles away they celebrate something, a shallow feeling,
I will never be part of, but fear not,
Some portion of my soul still walks
Completely in this world, wondering,
If it is but a fading wraith,
Awaiting instruction for joining the truly living
To its counterpart of divided earth, water, sky,
And, but a traveler, I,
On Such a night as this!

To NightHawk., for teaching me to believe again.



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To my roommate ~

in the event of a Fire Drill

When I die
let me go
french fried
like a potato
in my bed
one night late
on an otherwise uneventful date
spontaneous combustion--
Whoosh
my gorgeous thighs
McDonald's golden fries

Ann M. Algeo

Yesterday, Two Years Ago

Yes, my father died yesterday
'Twas just two years ago
Why can't he be here with me now
He's in heaven, I know
 Why, Why
Did he lay down to die?
 How, How
Can I let him leave me?
Please can you help me find a way
I'm hurting, can't you see.

Yes, my dad left me and my mom
It has been just two years
I barely remember some things
I just see through my tears
 When, When
Can I see you again?
 With wings
Like angels will you fly?
For my mom, I have to stay calm
Just, please, don't say good-bye.



Min Skat (My Love)

Within the embrace
Of his strong arms,
My heart starts to race
As we discover my charms.

With his gentle hands
And his loving kisses
He frees me from the monster's bands
To let me pursue my wishes.

With kind words and support
He helps me rebuild me
Like the storm-ruined port
After the destructive tsunami.

Rebecca J. Walter

I Never Made it to Never-Never Land

The dancing flame illuminated the eager, hungry faces as it pirouetted upward from the shiny Bic lighter like a soul shooting from the depths of hell towards the grassy Elysian fields. It bent around the tarnished, metallic rim with an evil leer that foreshadowed its unholy purpose. As a key unlocks a door, the flame washed the sweet, dry leaves and released a magic carpet of smoke that would carry its passengers to Never-Never Land. This smoke that meandered through the hallowed gates of my body and found its resting place within the palette or my soul.

My journey began that evening, a journey that would follow a rainbow of dreams and take me to victual in Heorot with God himself . . . or so I thought.

That night was many moons ago in the past. Burned into my memory are the vivid details like the scrawling on an old tenement wall. With a grand twelve years of life experience behind me, I stood tall and took on the world, or at least the weight of it on my shoulders. It was a sultry August evening in Austin, Texas, and a pack of my dearest friends and I were living the personification of boredom. I had done it all, or at least that is what I thought as I sprawled across the old and beaten couch in Mike's basement. Mike was a tall, lanky fellow with thin wisps of hair crawling out from underneath his backwards baseball cap, covering those beady and penetrating eyes. Those eyes penetrated like a dagger into my mind when he voiced a simple four word question. His roughly cracking voice broke the silence . . . "You wanna get high?"

At twelve years old, I had learned all about drugs in school, but never really paused to give them much

thought. In the five seconds that it took my to summon the courage to reply, my solitary thought was, "Why Not?" The answer to that fateful response came many cold winters later when I had lost my teetering grip on reality and was no longer envisioning a light at the end of a tunnel, but instead was concentrating on the freight train of joy riding straight to hell, wondering if I should jump . . . My answer to those eyes was a simple, "What the hell, I ain't got nothing better to do." That brilliant display of logic eventually crowned me the leader of the pack, and lemmings everywhere leaped onto that smoky magic carpet, ending their own person sojourns in reality and beginning a pilgrimage to the hallowed shores of Never-Never Land.

The pilot of that flight was always a simple Bic lighter igniting some dry, crumpled leaves, freeing a bittersweet, phantasmal guide that would lead the lost boys and girls down the crooked staircase to the depths of pandemonium. Looking down during this ride, I have watched my traveling companions lose sight of the light of the morning. I buried some of them, send letters to those whose minds have deserted them, and send flowers whenever one lands in a hospital after they discover they cannot afford Charon's toll.

My own world was spinning out of control at one point and I desperately wanted to stop the ride, but no one would show me the brakes . . . so . . . I jumped.

After the crash, I began to use my mind to think, to reason, and to explore this wonderful blue orb spinning through space, instead of seeing it as a landing pad for sprites and fairies that I was following through the sky . . . towards the second star to the right . . . the path that I followed until the reality of morning woke me up.

Joshua Sanders

The Predator

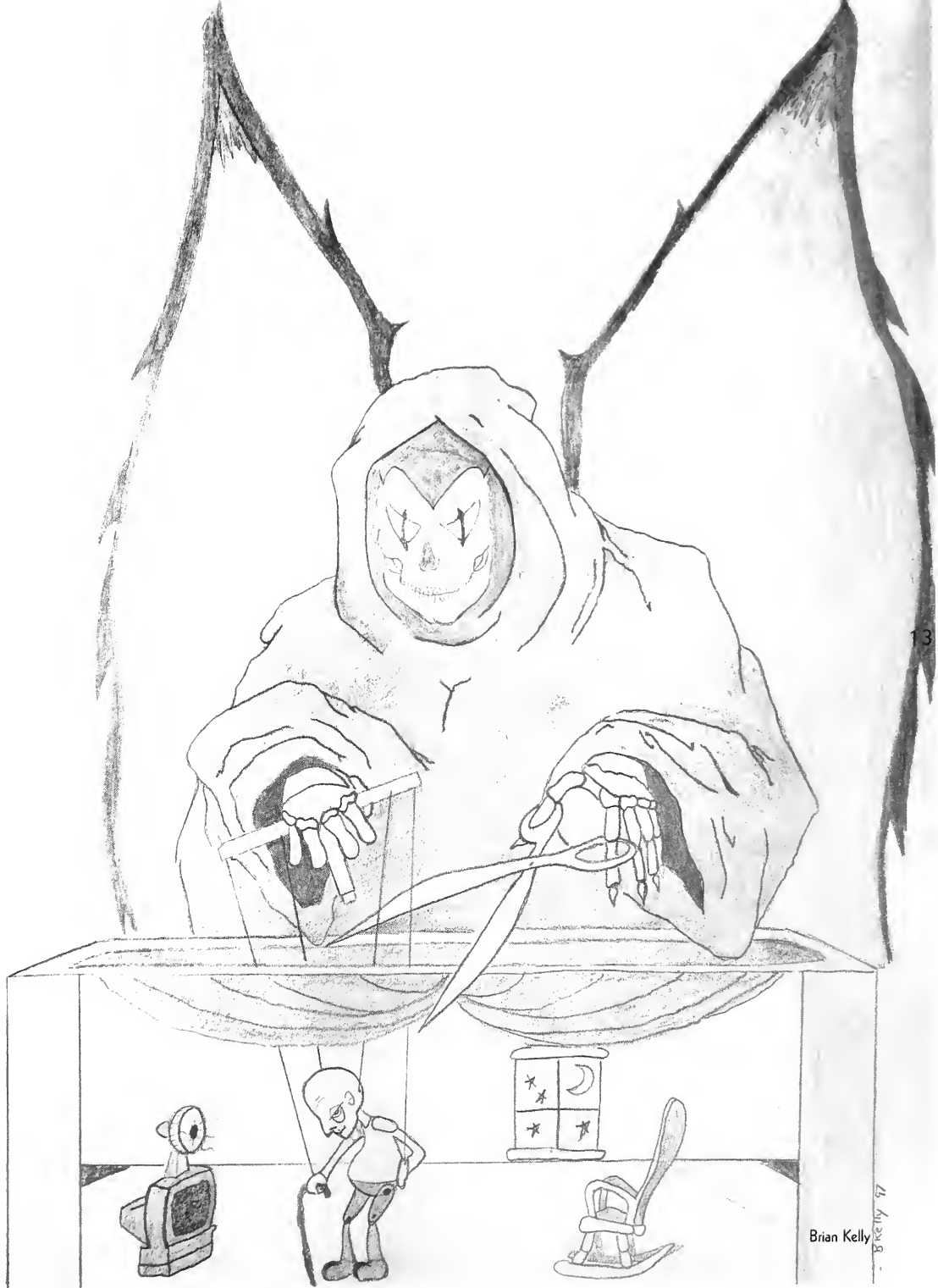
In the simmering heat sat a lonely old man,
Cooling himself with breezes from a rusty fan.

He could feel the hostile, stalking predator
Lurking closer to him more and more and more.

It spied on him with fierce red eyes,
Uttering no sounds, growls or cries.
With muscles tense, the creature struck,
Giving the man no time to duck.

A slow sigh escaped from his lips.
Into his chest the gray head dips.
A peaceful expression covers his face,
As Death prepares for a fearful new chase.

Robin Goldblum



Perspective

Take a look around you. What do you see?
Do you see a forest? Can you even see a tree?
Take a look around you. What do you see?
Do you see a crowd of people? Can you even see ME... see me?

If beauty's in the eye of the beholder, then open up your MIND instead!
We don't need to choke a river to build a house, or make a loaf of bread.
Hard choices aren't convenient... but neither is being dead.

Can you see over your money? Can you see past your time?
Can you look beyond your backyard and see where it joins up with mine?
Take a look at the ground; what do you see?
Another waste disposal systems, or your own DESTINY... destiny?

If beauty's is the eye of the beholder, then open up your MIND instead!
We don't need to choke a river to build a house, or make a loaf of bread.
Hard choices aren't convenient... but neither is being dead.

There's been enough fingers pointin'; enough words thrown around.
There's already enough red tape to CHOKER us, but show me one piece of healthy ground!
Take a look around you. What do you see?
Do you see a bunch of problems, or an OPPORTUNITY... opportunity?

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If beauty's in the eye of the beholder, then open up your MIND instead!
We don't need to choke a river to build a house, or make a loaf of bread.
Hard choices aren't convenient... enough said.

David Aho

How Could You Do This?

How could you do this? My back against the headboard. Arms wrapped around my knees pulling them to my chest. I watch you pace. Your sneakers make no noise on the hardwood floor. You walk to the left, then to the right; your dry eyes never leaving mine. You hold your shoulders upright, like a proud conductor in front of this orchestra. When you stop pacing, your whole body faces mine, opening and closing your fist, you say, **Just tell me why!**

Your appearance is strangely calm like you are in control; yet your lips quiver and voice wavers; little bits of spit fly out as you speak. Clenching your fists and pacing, you stare at me just waiting to lose control. My eyes nervously scan the room and find there is not escape because you pace in front of the door. I contemplate the window and find the gun with its long barrel, leaning against the wall, in the corner. I remember you showing me how to use it for protection once. **If anyone comes in here, you just shoot 'em with this. It'll probably knock you on your ass, but it'll knock them into the neighbor's house.** The muscles in my face droop in fear and I feel a burning rising up from my insides, stopping at the back of my throat, tasting like burnt liquid. I remember the story you told me of your drunken stepfather holding a similar gun to your face when you demanded he stop hitting your mother. Unafraid of death at that miserable moment in your childhood you dared him to pull the trigger. And now, as you proceed with your interrogation, back and forth, back and forth, asking the same questions over and over, I am scared of you.

You sit next to me, reaching out to me with both hands, not for comfort, but a gesture of despair. Your clear blue eyes are so close to mine, but they are unfamiliar. They usually water when you are touched by my action; when I put on my baby voice, bury my head in your chest and tell you that I love you. Now these strange eyes contain a pain that runs deeper than love. Tears well up and, without blinking, flow out the side like a watering hose. The tears flow down to deep impressions in the sides of your mouth like an empty river being filled once again. **Just tell me what I did wrong?** You wait for me to answer. Your eyes stare hard with

eyebrows slightly raised and lips parted, exposing your bottom row of teeth. Your face tells me strangely you hope I will say it was all your fault; that you neglected me and I had no choice. You would argue, but in the end you would say how sorry you were and how you didn't know, and if it meant coming to this, you would have changed. But you still can change, and you will, and please understand you didn't mean to make me do it. That there's still hope for us and how much you love me and that we will get through it. You wait patiently and anxiously for me to say all this and more because you know it will be easier for you to take the blame. It always was. You expect me to bawl and tell you how rough it's been all of these years being with you, and what else could I do? The seconds linger and the quiet in the room is immense. And you wait for my reply.

Camille Ngrua



Help, No Help Needed

Without any effort on my part,
I became.

Without any choice on my part,
I became a male.

With some struggle
I became a man.

With some privilege
I became a husband

With great pleasure
I became a father

18 With some perseverance
I earned a living.

With some conflicts
I became a Dad

With some regrets
I'm turning gray.

With great remorse and helplessness
One day
I'll lay it all away.

Dr. Richard Ziemer

Please Touch Me

I am your baby,
Please touch me!
Not just when you feed me and diaper me
But stroke my legs, my arms, my back, my head.
Hold me close in tenderness
That says ~ I love you.

I am your teenager,
Please touch me!
I need to feel a fond love coming through your hands, your
arms;
I need to see it in your eyes,
Hear it in your voice,
Even when we disagree.
Some of me is still a child ~
Please touch me!

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I am a child with a family of my own,
Please put your arms around me
Mother, Father, when my heart aches
With heartaches you have known.
Now that I am a parent,
I see you differently and love you more.
When you embrace your grandchildren,
don't forget me!

I am your aging parent,
Please touch me
The way my mother did
When I was young.
My hair is coarse and gray
But please stroke it.
My hand is withered but hold it,
Embrace my tiring body.
I need your strength ~ Please touch me!

Love

If you only knew how much you mean to me,
I sit and dream of the places you and I could be,
On the sand we are side by side,
Watching the waves as time goes by,
In a forest near a stream,
The sun shines through the trees with one single beam,
Caressing us both as we stand there,
Giving a silvery shine to the air,
In a clearing by a lake,
You turn to me, my hand you take,
Will I be yours, you ask of me,
For all time, as the endless sea,
As we gaze into the star lit sky,
Together forever will be you and I.

Rachel Stick



A Pale Blue Housecoat

My mother died when I was a child, nearly forty years ago, and many memories of her have faded, but the following episode, seemingly so trivial, became vividly etched in my mind. It involved a peddler who visited our neighborhood in the Bronx in New York City.

He would come to the door about once a month, a huge suitcase strapped to his back so that his arms nearly scraped the floor. As small as I was, I could peer into bloodshot eyes. My mother made him tea, served in a milk glass, while he removed the burden from his shoulders and attempted to stand erect. He couldn't.

Waiting for the lid of his battered rectangular box to be lifted, I planted myself in front of it, expectant and curious, as if it were our little twelve-inch black and white television. After three lumps of sugar and a wedge of lemon were dropped in his glass, after he gulped twice and wiped his steamed glasses, the bearer of treasures opened his box and scattered the contents upon the vinyl kitchen chairs, formica table top, and my lap ~ a rainbow of garments, called housecoats by my mother.

She always bought something from him. How could you not after studying the furrows framing his mouth, the sparse white hair, and rheumy eyes: Willy Loman in the flesh, but less affluent. On this particular morning, he singled out two housecoats from the heap and extolled their

virtues. One was pale blue, with a navy bird stitched on the pocket; the other was identical except for color: an aquamarine sporting a black bird. No budding Oscar de la Renta, I was dazzled by the beauty of both.

"Which do you like?" my mother inquired. "You pick the one I should take."

I was overwhelmed. She was allowing me to make such a momentous decision. I was proud. She trusted my judgment. I carefully wiped sticky hands on a corduroy jumper and fingered both garments. I held each up to her bosom. I dawdled and debated until the ancient peddler, muttering something under his breath, placed a greasy cap back on his shiny head. I was five and terrified of mistakes.

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"Which one do you like," I threw back at my mother, waiting to be rescued. No anchor was thrown.

"You choose," she insisted.

I pointed a stubby, nail-bitten finger, three crumpled dollars were exchanged, and I held the pale blue housecoat, staring into the navy bird's rhinestone eye.

Why do I remember that sloppily stitched bird so vividly when I can barely remember what I wore yesterday?

Linda K. Kuehl

All of Me

I wonder if it can ever be just right,
Perfect,
If someone can ever love all of me,
Not just my virtues.

Can someone adore my faults,
And quirks,
And humanness,
Solely because they are a part of me?

Can he appreciate the unevenness
Of my breasts,
And think it makes them ever more tasty,
Caressable
For their distinct me-ness?

Can he inhale the odor of my filth,
And sweat,
And knowing it as my perfume,
Love its sourness?

He must find it ever so endearing,
And necessary!,
That I wish so much for fairies to be
real,
And wonder everlasting.

He must not tolerate the absence
Of even one of my incongruent dreams,
But find them catching
And become sick with giddiness,
Enthusiasm, passion, and silly laughter
In my company
As I burst with this disease.

He must know when to assure me
Of my beauty or creativity,
Certain of my ability,
But also keep me modest

And striving
Gently criticizing and suggesting
In an undemanding manner.

He must love my failures
And shortcomings,
Not just despite them,
But me with them.

My dear, do you love all of me?
Could you never do without
The memory of my willingness,
Eagerness
To embrace your presence,
Your wholeness,
That sweet January in the desert,
Because I knew,
I hoped,
The fit would be so perfect?

My love, do you understand
My need to be restless,
An artist and scientist
Seeking to envelop
Everything
All at once
And a little time?

My sweet can you relish all of me
Not excluding even one detail
Or annoyance?
Can you take the sweet with the
sour,
The bitter with the sweet?
Can you revel my strange spice,
Follow my recipe?

I wonder if it can ever be just right,
Perfect,
If you can ever love all of me.

Carrie Preston

Hunger for the Blade

Oh the aching inner pain.
No legal drug can relieve
The agony of the insane.
So up must slide the sleeve
To satisfy what is forbade ~
The hunger for the blade.

The struggle has begun.
Must think, must not cut.
Stop the flow or let it run?
Can't think, should I cut?
The choice that must be made ~
Feed the hunger for the blade?

A pattern that runs deep ~
When hurt is great, hope is gone,
Slice the skin and let it seep.
Repeating pattern, rolling on.
The choice is long since made ~
Feed the hunger for the blade.

The flick of gleaming silver
Lets flow a blood red river
Of pain released, agony ceased.
If too deep, the source deceased.
The purchase price is paid ~
Fed the hunger for the blade.

Rebecca J. Walter

The Vampire's Lesson

Good evening, fair mortal! I do regret that this discussion could not occur during the day, but my "condition" prevents that. Don't treat me like an innocent child, even though I may appear to be one, for I am a hundred-year-old vampire. Louie, my companion, bestowed upon me his gift of darkness in time to save me from the plague that mercilessly killed all. It preserves my youth and beauty forever.

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However, a vampire cannot remain unchanged without blood. Unlike mortal drinking, blood needs to be savored, every drop adored. This red wine of life demands a certain respect. To waste any amount, no matter how small, is considered sacrilege among my kind. It warms our bodies, and calms the ferocious hunger that burns deep inside of us.

First, the perfect victim must be chosen. A rich, vibrant, young individual tastes the sweetest and most fulfilling. Avoid people displaying signs of disease, old age, poverty, and uncleanness, for they taste of depression and pain. Once the prey has been spotted, mesmerize them to accompany you to any isolated spot. If so desired, have them take you out for a good time first, perhaps to the theater. Usually, they will not need the money later in life.

As you lead the prey away from the warm glow of other mortals, an important decision must be made. Does the victim deserve to be brought across and become one of the undead? Loneliness often factors into the existence of a vampire. However, like the offspring of any mortal, nobody can predict how the new vampire will treat the world. Many develop into ruthless killers that later need to be destroyed.

Once alone, sink your elongated teeth into his exposed neck. The nectar of life will flow generously down your throat as you feed. The victim will soon become weak, and the heartbeat will begin to fade in your ears. Do not continue to drink once the heart has ceased beating. As death infects the mortal, it contaminates the blood. If the corrupted blood enters you, incredible pain unlike any you have experienced as a mortal will envelop your body. Death surrounds us always, but it must never be allowed to touch us.

Finally, the empty shell of your latest victim must be laid to rest with great respect. We like to believe that the souls of those we feed upon always go to heaven for their great sacrifice, leaving behind the vacant body. A carefully hidden grave usually suffices, for the police can never seem to unravel the mystery of our existence. However, I prefer cremation. The spreading of the ashes over a special place, like a park or ocean, seems more proper to me than a simple burial.

As the first mortal I have revealed the secret of our feeding process to, I hope you understand that you cannot be allowed to leave. The exposure of this special knowledge to the public would be detrimental to both my race's secrecy and yourself. Insane asylums are never fun. Besides, I need a snack anyway.

Robin Goldblum

A Son-in-Law Reflects

Any mother-in-law joke embarrasses me when I reflect on Claire E. Yeakel, the most wonderful mother-in-law a man could have. As I got to know her, she shared with me some hilarious jokes of her own repertoire, most of them in the Pennsylvania German dialect.

I first met her when she and Forrest (Pop) Yeakel came to college to visit Adelle in the 1950's. She moved with grace and sported in a classy way those narrow, arched eyebrows which movie stars wore in the 1920's and 1930's and a welcoming smile. In 1960, I was invited to Quakertown for Christmas and witnessed the busy Yeakel household at their bakery on Hellertown Avenue. No stranger to work, this farm boy from Oregon pitched in to help Pop Yeakel move carts and trays of baked goods from the store to the Q-Mart, to Leh's, and to various other destinations. I also gained ten pounds and met many friends of the Yeakels.

Mom Yeakel was a special hostess to me, and four years later when I returned for another Christmas vacation, Pop said, "Richard is going to propose; he's not coming eight hundred miles just to say 'Merry Christmas'." Pop was right. The following July we were married in Quakertown and I became a romantic heart transplant to Pennsylvania. My identity as an outsider was established early by saying, "I'm Adelle's husband"; and in reality I was Claire and Forry Yeakel's son-in-law.

I was around Adelle's mom for over thirty years ~ longer than I was around my own mother (yet living, in Oregon). Adelle reminded me that biblically I had to forsake my father and mother; wives were not required to do this. Mom's smile of kindness was shed on me just as it was on many other people in Quakertown when she decorated their cakes or put confectionery snapdragons on the backs of children's little hands.

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Several years ago Adelle, our daughter, my mother-in-law and I were delayed on a flight returning from Florida. The stewardess played a game with passengers, rewarding us with bottles of wine for coming up with correct answers; one question was, "How many of you married people have pictures of your mothers-in-law in your wallets or purses?" I was embarrassed as Mom looked at me and said, "Richard! don't you have a picture of me?" Soon I inherited one of her wearing a pink suit and portraying that warm smile.

When she made her last will, she asked what I would like to have to remember her by, and I replied, "Your Buick or your next Buick." Her influence on others in this community convinces me how fortunate I was to marry into such a wealth of relationships. 1997 has brought sorrow to many other people too ~ some of them in far more tragic ways than I suffer. But I have since learned how emotionally empty others also feel as a result of Mom Yeakel's death. She died sometime during the longest night of the year ~ two days before Christmas. I could not even guess how bright Heaven must have seemed to her in contrast to the darkness of that night and her pain. The outpouring of condolences of friends and neighbors in this community since then overwhelms me. I could write a book about experiences with Mom, but consider this a preface. As the pangs of grief eventually subside, look for a smile on my face driving Mom's Buick.

Dr. Richard C. Ziemer

On Even Keel

O
LORD OUR
G
O
D
NOW DO
WE IN THIS
WIDE OCEAN OF
A WORLD LOOK FOR THAT STABLE
QUALITY WHICH WILL GIVE US
SOMETHING TO BELIEVE AND
SOMEONE TO BELIEVE IN.
BE A RUDDER TO OUR
SHIP OF LIFE
AND KEEP
US ON AN
EVEN
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Dr. Richard Ziemer

Alone

I WRITE FROM THE HEART
-- FROM THE SOUL
-- OUT OF HATRED

ALONE

NOT IN THE DARK
OR FROM MYSELF
I JUST FEEL ALONE
ALONE - ALONE - ALONE
JUST LEAVE ME ALONE

"PLEASE COME BACK"-----"LATER"
WHEN I'M ALL ALONE

Jeff Primus

A Summer Romance

8-9-97

a blanket
a moon
ice-cream or cubes
a kiss
a whisper
wet grass
the crickets will pass
good-bye
i'll see you soon

Jeff Primus

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Have A Nice Life

DOES ANY BODY KNOW WHERE I AM
WHO I AM
DOES ANY BODY CARE
"HELLO, NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN"
"HOW'S LIFE"
VANISH WITHOUT A TRACE
WILL I SEE YOU AGAIN
I GUESS SO
EVERYTHING I SEE AND DO
REMINDS ME OF YOU
HAVE A NICE LIFE

Jeff Primus

Winter Hues

Seamstress

Delicate bird-tracks:
Tiny gray stitches
In the white snow-quilt
That softly blankets the slumbering land.

Composure

At golden-rosy dawn,
The blue-white snow
A motionless sea
Of silent beauty.

Jeweltones

Brilliant vermillion
Against dazzling white
And emerald green:
Cardinal on a snow-graced holly.

Hush

Amethyst shadows
Rest coolly upon the fresh-fallen snow
In the soothing hush
Of nightfall.

Karen Schramm



Linda K. Kuehl

As I lie here in my bath in the hot water,
surrounded by the cold white walls.

I think of you

I think of how I wanted to kiss you in the kitchen yesterday

When you looked down at me with all the want in the world
showing in your eyes.

But I couldn't because I have him and
you have her

But I need you the way she thinks she needs you.

So I lie here crying for you

Lying in the hot water, surrounded
by the cold, white walls.

EAL

a little girl lost
putting on makeup
hairspray in the air
trying to fit into a group
her sweater is hole-y
her jeans are frayed
what will they think of me today?
maybe they'll like me today.

to Kalifornia

LYING THERE, WATCHING YOUR SWEET,
SLEEP-SOFTENED FACE
I WORRY THAT I'LL WAKE UP
AND YOU'LL BE NOTHING
BUT THE BEST DREAM I'VE EVER HAD....

EAL

Porphyria's Tale

"Dad," Kristy moaned, "This new house sucks! I don't care what you and mom say cause I hate it, just hate it! It's old, it's creepy, and the kids at school say it's haunted."

"Enough Kristy," Dad ordered.

"But Daddy," Kristy whined.

"You heard me, Kristy; I said that is enough of your nonsense. If you keep it up, you will be grounded."

"Whatever!" Kristy knew she was right because she heard the story of Porphyria at school. And everyone understood, except for her parents, that in this old house is where it all happened.

"Kristy? Kristy. . .your father and I are leaving now to go to dinner, . . .okay?"

"Have a good time," Kristy hollered.

After her parents left, Kristy decided she was going to prove to them that the house was haunted. Carefully, Kristy walked from room to room trying to decide where she should start. Finally, she decided to search the den. As Kristy walked about in the den, she discovered a passage next to the fireplace. Carefully, she ducked her head down and entered the passage.

"Wow," Kristy muttered, "It sure is creepy in here."

"No it's not," a high-pitched voice replied.

"Who, what, where are you?" a frightened Kristy asked.

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"I do not mean to scare you, but I have come to warn you," the high-pitched voice responded. "My name is Porphyria and I used to live here with my gentleman friend."

"Oh my gosh! You are the story everyone at school talks about. They say you were killed here on Halloween by your boyfriend; he strangled you or something."

"That's right. . .but he is still not satisfied."

"Huh," Kristy interrupted, "I don't get it."

"You see, when he strangled me with my hair, he did not kill my spirit."

"You're like a ghost?"

"No, I am a spirit and I have come to warn your family about what will happen if they do not get out by tomorrow, Halloween. This passageway is where I stay until someone finds me. It is the only place that I can feel safe from his madness," Porphyria replied.

"What will happen?"

"He claims he will come back and search his house. If he finds people in his house, well, he will strangle them."

"Okay, yeah, yeah right, whatever. . .Kristy, once again, you are letting your overactive imagination take over," Kristy reminded herself.

"Please do not let this tragedy happen again. He will not give up; he is very crazy. I cannot even begin to describe the crazed look he had in his eyes the night he strangled me."

"Well, since you're the genius, what can I do to make my parents believe me. They never believe me; I'm just a kid, so what can I do?"

"Just keep them away from the house tomorrow night. He will go after anyone in the house."

"That sounds easy but I bet it won't be. Porphyria, how come he never captured your soul?

Porphyria? Porphyria? Porphyria?," Kristy called. From the passageway, Kristy could hear the large front door groan as it opened. Carefully, she ran from the narrow, brick passage before anyone would find her.

"Hi, honey, we're home. Kristy, where are you?" her parents called.

"Mom, Dad, guess who was here while you were gone. Do ya give up? It was Porphyria. . . you know, the lady who was killed in this house on Halloween. And this house has an awesome secret passage."

"Young lady, before your mother and I left for dinner, I distinctly remember telling you to cut this nonsense out. Since you have deliberately disobeyed me, you will not, and I mean not, be allowed to go trick-or-treating with your friends."

"Come on, Dad, lighten up. Besides, if I don't go trick-or-treating, you won't get to have all my Snickers," Kristy offered.

"That's enough Kristy. Now go to your room."

As Kristy sat alone in her room, she began to cry. She felt hopeless and had no idea what to do. If something happened to her parents, she would be lost forever. But her parents did not want to cooperate. As Kristy yawned, she realized she had a major problem and no one would believe her. Kristy rubbed her eyes, not realizing how tired she was. . . .

"Kristy, Kristy, wake up sleepy head," Mom called. "Your dad and I have decided that you may go trick-or-treating, but Dad will go along with you."

"Huh?" Kristy responded. Slowly, she glanced around her bedroom looking for something familiar. "What a terrible dream," Kristy muttered.

"Hurry up, Kristy. Let's get ready to go," Dad called.

"Okay, Dad." Carefully, she put on her costume her mom made. This year she was Cinderella. The beautiful blue gown fit her perfectly.

"I'm ready everyone," Kristy called. As she glided down the steps, a cold, creepy feeling kept brushing along her neck.

"You look like a princess," Dad said, as he carefully placed the crown upon her head.

"The costume is perfect," Mom announced.

"Well, Daddy, let's go before everyone else gets out." She knew she sounded much happier than she felt and that feeling kept bothering her.

As Kristy and her dad walked from house to house, that strange feeling continued to brush Kristy's neck. It felt as if it were trying to make her turn around. But she continued to ignore it.

Halloween is an all day event in their tiny town. By the time the sun set, Kristy began to grow tired and just wanted to go home. Slowly, as they walked up the little stone path to their creepy house, an ear-piercing scream startled them. When Kristy looked up at the house, she remembered Porphyria's warning. As she approached the front door, she began to wonder if Porphyria's warning had come true.



The Light and My Beautiful Lee

Here we are again in the light of the great, blue moon

Our forbidden love can no longer be denied.

I tremble at your hesitant kiss,

As your soft lips meet mine.

For a moment I can forget the world,

Your obligations and mine

Fly away in the blue moonlight.

You pull away and softly say "I love you."

Though we both know we can never be each other's.

Why does it have to be like this?

My beautiful, dear, sweet Lee,

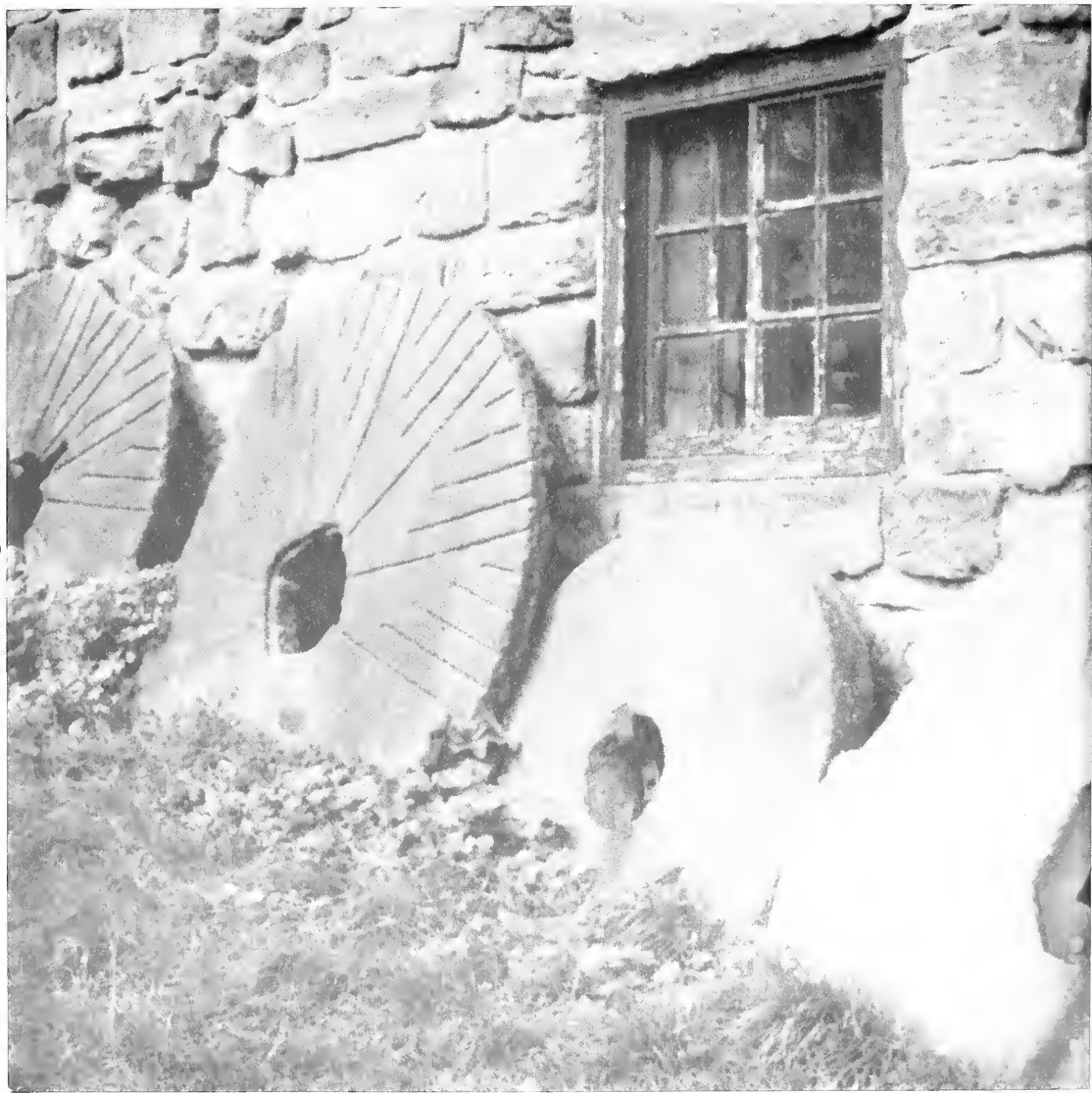
Just hold me again, then kiss me,

And for now I'll be content.

Though we'll never show our forbidden love

Except tonight in light of the great blue moon.

EAL



Scenes from the Wild Blue

Rainbows

All this time,
You've thought 'twas the rain
That made those colorful sky-ribbons ~
When it was really the pixies
Building a sky bridge
To reach the other side.

The Flock

The eager wind
Shepherded the fleecy clouds
Along the cool blue pasture
Of the autumn sky.

Pillow Fight

The sky today is sapphire blue,
And the clouds swirl like scattered white feathers,
As if God and His angels
Have been engaging in a playful pillow fight.

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Descent

Snowdrops sitting on a cottonpuff cloud,
Gathering courage.
It's time ... Now ~ JUMP!
They leap into the frosty air
And plummet, faster, ever fast,
'Til their parachutes burst out into fluffy white
And delicately they descend
To the waiting ground.

F-16

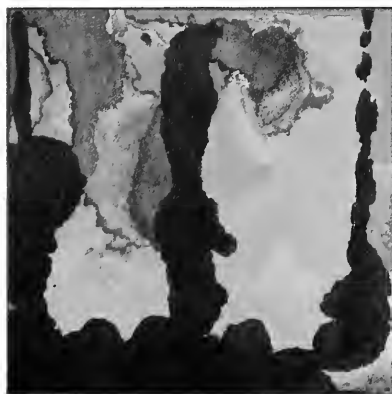
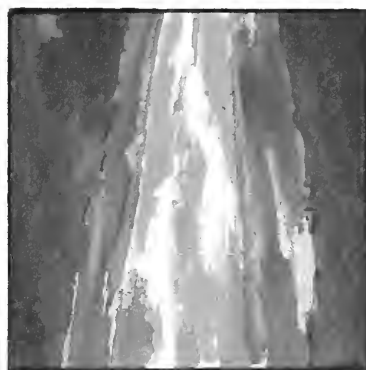
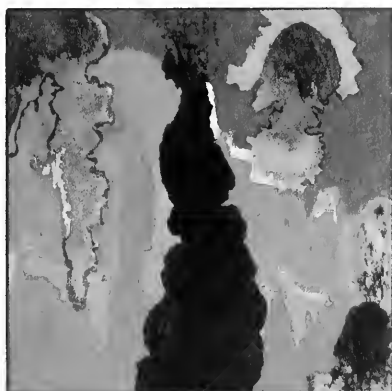
The sky an ice rink,
Crystalline blue,
Accepts delicate etchings
Executed by perfect blades:
The Falcon takes flight.

Karen Schramm

Out of the Ashes

Love was a word ne'er you believed in,
Before, and maybe not since,
What happened
Was deceptively simple, and yet
Ten thousand words and a heartfelt estranged cry
Filled with the silence of eternal cold void,
Could not do justice to the feeling.
Was it the candle's glow at the edge of the lake,
Or forbidden nights in the sultry bed like a tomb?
The two of you searching for something very few dare,
And fewer find,
Did you catch hold of the edge?
Or maybe grab onto the stem of the Rose,
And it was your heart that bled when your finger
Was pricked by the thorn.
Screaming through the night, each your love sought the other,
Even across space, a link was made, boundless by separation,
Severed, it tore a hole through her being,
And possibly yours, but, oh, you weren't to blame,
Just because your patience ran out.
You couldn't stand the thought that she still
Questioned and searched, always deeper and further beyond,
Trying to calm a restless call
As it twisted you,
Like tortured iron in a furnace of rage,
You broke the tie and fled.
Did you know she still can't fill the emptiness,
the bleeding rift torn through her soul?
None could hurt her more than one she loved so much,
And as she looks into new love's eyes,
Searching for an essence, a reminder of you,
The tear that falls says all that needs said,
While the flame held aloft will never fade,
She will be able to turn and walk towards the light of her shadow,
The memories worn as a cloak both wounding and shielding her from what lies ahead.

Rachael Shenyo







Stephanie R. Scarborough

A Mother's Aging

There is here;
then is now.
Dreams are memories, decayed.
Somehow
time circles back
end-to-beginning-to-end,
as time shapes a womb ~
again.

Jan Corbett



Marian McGurk



Rebecca Walter

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EAL





The Gleaner

High School Writing Competition

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The English Department
is very happy to have sponsored its first
high school writing competition,
which was designed to showcase the work
of young writers in the area.

We were amazed at the talent, sensitivity, and
ear for language shown in their poetry and prose.
Our thanks and congratulations go to them, their families,
and, of course, their English teachers!

L.M.





Devoured

You took me as if I were food.
You devoured me and tasted me.
But once you hit my core,
You took one last bite
And broke my seeds.
Those seeds were my soul.
But you didn't care
because my juice was so sweet
and my appearance so ripe.
I poured out with flavor
and you swallowed me largely.
Once you were done,
you took one last look
and enjoyed how you loved me.
But I was over and done,
and I had no use for you.
Thrown away without a thought,
as if I had only satisfied.
You have scarred my poor soul
And tasted my love.
Because my juice was so sweet
and my appearance so ripe.

Blake Ann Miller
Council Rock High School
Mrs. Andrea Lamberth
Grade 12
First Place Poetry

Grammom's Tree

Remember what it was like to be
stuck in a time somewhere
between death and immortality,
between alpha and omega,
between then and now.
A time when the serenity of youth was frozen in place.
When the zebra striped body of
Grammom's birch tree extended
its arms to the heavens in prayer.
When the ladder of smooth bark
stretched upwards:
Black/

White/

Black/

White/

Black . . .

When the thin branches atop that tree
held you precariously with bony fingers
and rocked you to silent beat of Nature's Song.
When its leafy hair flowed around you-
blossoming stubble in spring,
emerald in summer,
red-headed in autumn
and naked in winter.
Naked like your soul, chilled by the
thin Appalachian winds.
Naked in a time when all was pure.

Amanda Ribarchik
Bristol Jr./Sr. High School
Mrs. Doherty
Grade 11
Second Place Poetry

Imperfection

I feel the word
slip through my lips,
getting caught on my tongue
I feel a release in my soul,
a release from the impossible.
Standing with me,
and against me.

The dirt road
with muddy puddles,
which dare not dry in the sun,
hiding under tall trees.
Poured over with cement,
the holes and puddles, covering the
magic;
Killing my father.

Due to imperfection, not inspite of.
Seen too late
by knowing eyes,
and no return
to what never was,
but seemed to be -
now exists inside of me,
catching the word upon my tongue.

Kristen Horn
Neshaminy High School
Mr. Blair
Grade 11
Third Place Poetry

El Carnaval en la Guagua

The Carnival on the Bus

(set in Puerto Rico)

One step up, the next. Once I was up those small, rubber matted steps, I looked around for a comfortable place to sit. I remember exactly where I sat: window seat, second row on the right. The windows were closed in the cool morning air. I sat there quietly on my way to the town of Lares to buy a few necessities.

While I sat peacefully in my seat, more and more people filled the yellow bus. A little boy of eleven boarded the bus, his hair slicked back, dressed in his best shirt and jeans. He was going on the bus to town alone. A group of teenage boys hustled on awaiting their arrival in town, anxious to whistle at all the pretty girls they chanced to see. An aged old man in his straw *paba*¹, skin burnt by years of hard work under the tropical sun, counted his loose change as he read a newspaper while also stealing glimpses of the Widow Rivera. The Widow was in her brand new, bright orange, floral sun dress with shiny gold heels to "match." In her lap, a lap that had bounced many a child in the past, rested her matching gold pocketbook.

Looking out the fingerprinted window, passing palm tree after flower after fern, a little old couple of eighty or so sold their *batatas*² and *platanos*³ and *pinas*⁴ at three for a dollar in an old weather-beaten wood stand. A group of children stood outside their home waiting for their baby brother to be cleaned off after falling into a pile of rotten bananas, bananas whose stains would be come a lifelong memory.

¹ straw hat native to Puerto Rico

² Spanish sweet potatoes

³ plantains

⁴ pineapples

Suddenly, Giga climbed on the bus in her pink cotton dress and \$1.99 sandals that read "Puerto Rico" on the straps. She sported a hairdo of messed up pigtails. In her chubby hands she clutched a bag of *chicharrones*⁵, crunching and munching while successfully staring at each and every person on the bus and mumbling something under her breath. "Ay, no no! Tienes cookie? Tienes cookie?" (O my goodness! Do you have a cookie? Do you have a cookie?), she repeated over and over again. Giga was the crazy, middle-aged woman of the *barrio*⁶. In her never-ending search for a cookie, she ate quite well, and it showed. She was eccentric and always stared at people with her bottom lip hanging low and uncontrolled. She plopped down two seats away from me asking everyone if they had a cookie while munching on her fatty chicharrones.

It grew quite hot on the bus, and so windows were opened. The breeze rustled through hair and blew papers around. A woman in the back tried desperately to salvage her hairdo, one she had spent two hours doing so she'd look just right for her dentist appointment in town.

Nearing the final stop, the old eighty year-old man who ran the *piragua*⁷ stand began scraping his huge block of ice to make a fifty-cent *piragua* for a black-haired little girl in a puffy, red, and sequin-covered dress wearing a white pair of buckled patent leather shoes, scuffed on the side after chasing her brother around the *plaza*⁸.

⁵ pork rinds

⁶ the neighborhood

⁷ sno-cone

⁸ in Latin American countries, it is the town square as well as the center of town where the Roman Catholic Church is located

Suddenly, I heard loud roars of laughter from the back of the bus. There, the "information operators" of Lares were blabbing their latest bits of juicy gossip to one another. A fifty year old woman was the center of the conversation. She was braiding her long, grayish-brown hair while spurting out the juiciest bit of lies possible. "*Jose dejo a su mujer y se fue con la novia que era de Cheo!*" (Jose left his wife and ran away with Cheo's old girlfriend.) Screams and laughter roared, and what followed was more and more gossip.

Finally, we came to the stop, and I got off that lively bus. A little saddened, I watched as Giga asked for a cookie, as the old man glimpsed at the Widow Rivera, as the group of teenage boys whistled and hollered at a young girl in a black mini-skirt walking by, as the eleven-year-old boy walked off feeling even older than before, and as the group of middle-aged women laughed in the memories of that funny little ride.

Gianina Sagolla
Bristol High School
Mrs. Zenzel
Grade 12
First Place Prose

"Emerald Green"

I guess it all started when I turned fourteen; eighth grade really took its toll on me. It was early spring and the days had finally begun to grow longer, a pleasant change from the darkness that seems to encompass winter. The grass was breaking out from under its colorless cocoon and beginning to earn back its warm green luster. I too was breaking out from a shell, as I slowly learned about adolescence from the back of a general earth science class. Now, it's funny, I can't identify different types of clouds or the weather that each portends, and I can't distinguish between an oak and a maple tree, but I can remember every detail of the Fugazi T-shirt that Debbie Green used to wear. Green? That's so nondescript, more like Emerald. She was too cool to be anything but the girl who broke up with me after our first "date" to the sounds of Soul Asylum and the Gin Blossoms, that I still listen to on occasion, when I want to think about eighth grade and dances and things.

Dances always seemed to end in disaster and this one was no different. As many junior high school students as you could imagine all crowded outside of the cafeteria doors, tickets in hand, trying to hide their nervousness with laughter that just ended up sounding like nervous laughter. We all had our best clothes on, flannels unbuttoned over T-shirts or tied around the waists of semi-new jeans, trying to look messy and way too cool, and we did. I got there early, despite efforts to avoid just such a circumstance, it did have its benefits. I was one of the first to get my hand stamped and see the decorations on the cafeteria walls, and I got to see everyone else come in. I knew who was there and whom they came with, for everyone else's information if they asked. Deb was just cool enough to be the last one there, and her entrance was

unforgettable, mostly, I guess, because I didn't see it. Four or five of us stood in a circle the way eighth-graders do, with their hands in their pockets, weight on one leg more than the other, chins relaxed on chests with eyes fixed on the floor. I guess that's why no one saw her come in, but she was there and in a moment I felt the most beautiful fourteen-year-old forearm in the world draped around my neck, and its companions hand running playfully through my hair. I'm still a sucker for that sort of thing. I guess that's why. Out of all the guys in the streamer-filled cafeteria she'd chosen to wrap herself around my shoulders.

We were "going out," the way that eighth-graders go out when they don't really go anywhere because they're too embarrassed to let their parents drive. Everyone knew Deb Green, and now everyone knew that I was going out with her and that was just fine with me. We had been together for five days already and there was no reason to think that we wouldn't be together for the rest of our natural lives, but dances are funny that way; things always seem to change between seven-thirty and ten-thirty. I think it's somewhere around nine that a girl always starts to like someone else. Dances are funny in another way too; they're kind of an ecstasy of inhibitions. The opportunities for a fourteen-year-old boy on a tiled dance floor are almost endless. There's nothing like wrapping your arms around a girl's waist when she's just beginning to develop hips, and you can hold her close in the privacy of a largely fourteen-year-old mob that's just getting over its embarrassment about the opposite sex.

That night ended all too soon. It was dark and a little cool when the crowd moved out to the front of the school to wait for their parents, and discuss out of the earshot of the chaperones who had kissed whom with their tongues during the final

slow dance. Deb and I stood for those last few minutes holding hands apprehensively until my mom and dad pulled up in a run down old Buick. There's nothing harder for a fourteen-year-old boy who's standing with his girlfriend than to climb into the back seat of his parent's station wagon after a dance, except maybe climbing out of the back seat before a dance. I think my mom asked if I had a good time, but I'm sure that I was too cool to answer until the second or third time she asked. That night I stayed up late, going over the dance in my head, thinking of all the moments that would have been perfect for a kiss between two fourteen-year-olds in love.

The next day I got a phone call, its purpose to inform me that Deb and I wouldn't be going out any longer. I don't think I asked any questions, just said O.K. and hung up the telephone. The following Monday had very little to do with school at all; it was more like a series of questions and explanations, and "too bad, man's." Science class didn't really change much; I still sat in the back of the room, memorizing Deb's T-shirts, less for the sake of reminiscence, and more for a sense of consistency with the first six months of my eighth grade year. Yeah, eighth grade really took its toll on me, and in a way it still does.

Clifford Agocs
Neshaminy High School
Mr. Howie
Grade 12
Second Place Prose

Nanny and the Lure of the Ocean

I have journeyed to London, Paris, and Montreal, yet nothing can compare to what I learned one boiling summer afternoon on a beach in New Jersey with my family.

"Do we have everything?" Mom worriedly drilled Dad.

"I hope. We couldn't fit anything else in here, anyway. Let's get going to your mother's," Dad replied, taking the driver's seat in our 1987 Oldsmobile station wagon.

Any onlooker would have thought we looked like the typical family going on the typical family vacation. It was much more than that, though.

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We slid out of our driveway, geared up for our annual adventure to the Jersey shore. Squished between my two older brothers, I acted as mediator, attempting to eliminate slugs and name-calling episodes by screaming like a new-born, forcing my parents to turn around. I distinctly remember their glares and threats of, "If you don't stop that right now, I'm going to..." "Going to WHAT?" I always thought silently but never dared to say aloud. That comment quelled us for five minutes, and then the face-making resumed.

After twenty minutes of driving, we honked the horn and startled my grandmother, hauling a cooler of snacks and sodas to the back seat of the long, white Chrysler Fifth Avenue parked before us. At age nine, I thought it was my dream car, making me feel like a glamorous movie

star. My grandfather was reorganizing the suitcases in the trunk, determined to have a perfect fit. After the car was about to burst at the seams, my grandmother held the front door wide open, and my grandfather steadily held the pale, liver-spotted arm of my great-grandmother, better known as "Nanny." She wore a blue flowered dress, thick stockings, rose-colored glasses, and those dark, thin, plastic shades eye doctors give you after you've had drops in your eyes. Slightly out of breath, she reached the car. After the front door was checked three times to make sure it was locked, our caravan headed for the highway.

I heard my parents take deep breaths. The two hour drive ahead would be the longest part of our two-week vacation. Every year since I was born, and even before then, my family had vacationed in Ocean City. I pulled out my crinkled loose-leaf paper, on which I had scribbled everything I wanted to accomplish during the next fourteen days: amusement rides (particularly the Ferris wheel), the beach, the ocean, shell-hunting, feeding seagulls...the list went on and on, and I was determined to complete it.

Around noon, we spotted the first seagull and finally crossed the bridge linking Ocean City to mainland New Jersey. After eating lunch at McDonald's and picking up the key from the realtor, we made ourselves at home in the beautiful, beach-front home. We'd been going to the same house since I was two, but I was always amazed that at night the ocean could always be heard lapping at the shore at low-tide and crashing onto the land at high-tide.

I woke up the next morning, without the slightest inclination that this day would be engraved into my memory forever. I heard my parents and grandparents whispering but dismissed it and

focused on hunting down my pail and shovel. Today I would construct the best sandcastle ever to exist in the history of mankind. My dad and grandfather dragged five beach chairs from the shed and joined my brothers, my mom, my grandmother, and me, guiding Nanny onto the beach.

We discussed the best location to set up camp, practically making it a science. I voted to sit near the water, but my parents argued that it would be extremely crowded. However, going too far from the ocean's edge in the bone-dry sand would be scorching. We compromised, and settled twenty feet from the waves. My dad readily planted a chair securely in the sand, and my mom and grandmother assisted Nanny into it, while my grandfather held the back, preventing it from tipping.

Anyone would have known what Nanny desired. Eighty-nine years old and fairly ill, she stared at the endless waves ahead of her, just out of reach. She wanted to touch the water, sit in it, and let it gently cool her swollen legs. I noticed my parents and grandparents exchanging looks. It would be a trial to move her to the water's edge, but we knew it was a mission we had to complete.

"Come on, Mother. Let's go to the water," my grandmother began. "Boys! Rich! Rob!" They returned quickly, dripping wet, lugging a bucket of water between them, too heavy for just one to lift. "Help Nanny get to the water." They immediately manned their positions like soldiers, each taking a side. I sprang up and gazed at the path ahead. No shells, no obstacles, a smoother path lay before us.

Immediately after my brothers hoisted Nanny to her feet, I folded the chair and darted into the ocean. There, I positioned the chair to face

straight out into the ocean. It was perfectly stable. I glanced behind me and saw Nanny, gingerly choosing her steps. Her knee-length, tan cover-up danced behind her in the slight breeze. My brothers, the crutches, led her towards me, and my parents and grandparents acted as back-ups, ready to spring into action if needed. Her soles pounded against the smooth sand. Only five more feet to go.

She took her first step of the summer into the ocean, relieving her burning, aching feet. The sea enveloped her ankles as she sat. We formed a semi-circle behind her, staring into the Atlantic. Nanny's parched lips slowly broke into a radiant smile, gentle but strong.

Nanny passed away six months later, on a frigid January morning, a few days after New Year's. My grandparents, parents, brother, and I returned to the beach house the following summer and sat by the ocean's edge, but it just wasn't the same and never again would be.

Allison Liebscher
Upper Dublin High School
Dr. Sharon Traver
Grade 12
Third Place Prose



Filthy, Non-Gefilte Fish

Fishy, Fishy, in the ocean,
Awash in medicinal potions!
Vacationing Vet caught him in a net,
Bet the kids can't snare him for a pet!

Dr. Richard Ziemer



There was deceit and
deception.

There was neglect and
disregard.

There was pain and
loneliness.

There was sadness
and fear.

There was selfishness and
greed.

Then
There was you.

Now truth reigns,
respect abounds,
unselfishness lives,
joy prospers,

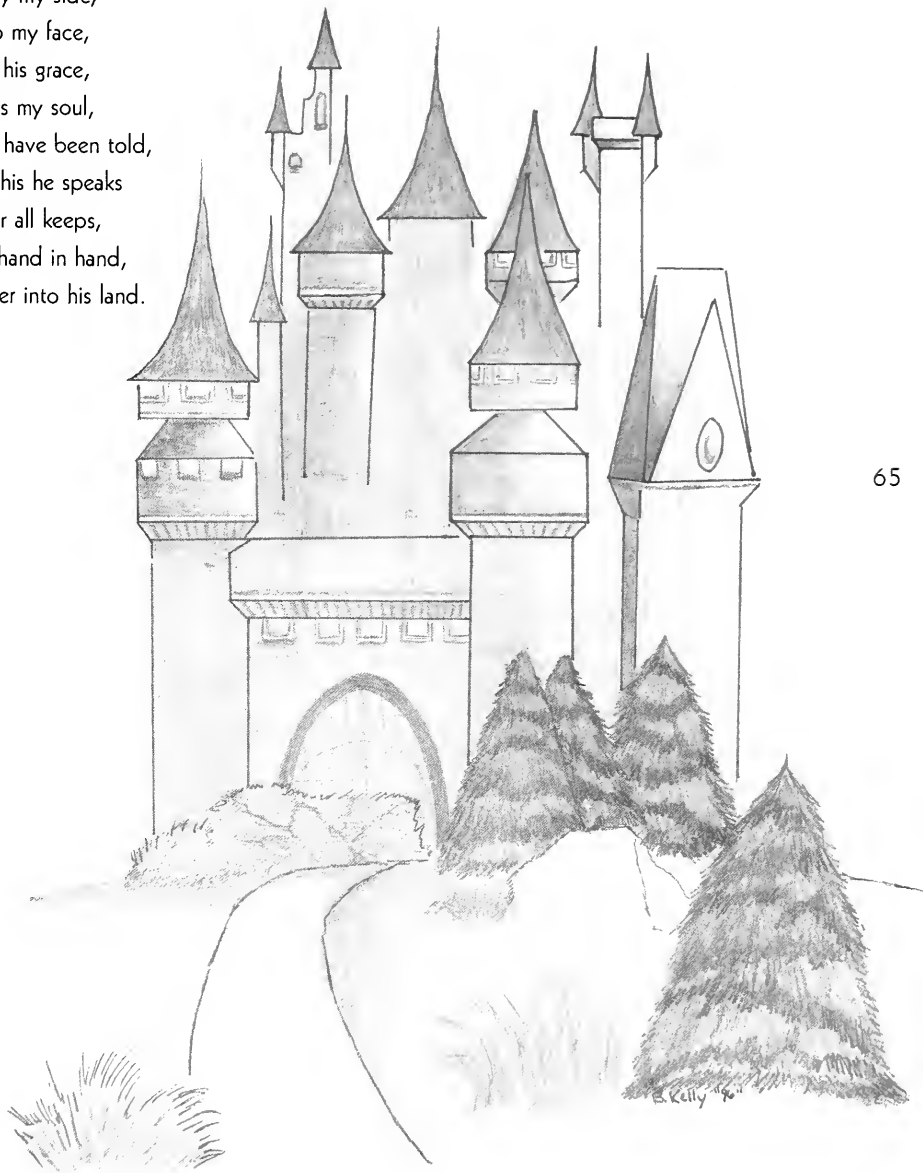
ALL IS RIGHT IN
THE WORLD.

Joann B. Donigan

Fairy Prince

A fairy prince so I see,
Comes to me from his tree,
I watch him come my eyes wide,
He takes a seat by my side,
His hand raises to my face,
All at once I feel his grace,
A golden light fills my soul,
A fairy's gift so I have been told,
Forever shall I be his he speaks
And he for me for all keeps,
We rise together hand in hand,
And enter together into his land.

Rachel Stick



The Zoo

"Must be 18" said the sign at the gate, not that anyone was there to check. Very few visitors even made it to the gate. The drive was long and dark. The sycamore trees that lined it were old and decrepit with dead branches waving overhead in the gusty wind like the arms of an old man flailing in the air desperately as he falls to his death. Towering over the sycamores were tremendous dark pines that blocked out the sun. Most cars that began the drive to The Zoo backed out when they saw the potholes riddling the gravel road.

Most who did enter soon regretted it. The first few cages inside the gate were empty. The black wrought-iron bars were twisted and rusty. Doors with broken locks or hinges creaked as the wind blew by. Visitors' skin crawled with the feelings of monstrous ghosts lurking in the cages waiting for the strength to strike again. Only the sounds from further down the path proved that The Zoo was not abandoned.

The monsters were rattling their cages. The bars clanged and sometimes the ground even shook. The path between the cages was twisty and frequently divided ~ what lay ahead could not be seen and what lay at the end of the path was a mystery. Still, some walked on.

It was a dirty cage housing two creatures of an unknown species. Somehow they seemed familiar. The larger creature was clearly male and the smaller could only be female. At first quiet, the scene quickly turned violent. She was so much smaller than he. He tricked her; he hurt her. Onward, quickly, escape from that sight.

Her cries could still be heard as the path curved past more empty cages. Some stood empty,

clean, untouched. Instead of seeming pristine, they stood in need of something ~ some dark and twisted horror to hide within.

Another bend and the darkness was overwhelming. Within the cages, cast in shadowy darkness, unspeakable acts were committed by various monsters upon all sorts of creatures. Sounds and sights numb the senses of the visitors. Again, hurry onward, past the beasts reaching their long arms through the bars to grab at the female visitors. They knew what they sought.

The ground shakes. An arena houses two giant beings ~ one dark and twisted, the other lighter, less mangled-looking. They fight a violent, brutal fight. Clearly a struggle to the death. The dark one wins most, the light losing strength but fighting on. Onward, before one is thrown from the ring.

Next are found a long series of walled, padlocked, and barred sections. There was no way to see within. On some the reinforcements were breaking and whatever was held within was trying to break loose. On others the bonds were still secure. The darkness hung in the air. Horrors could be felt with every breath. The path narrowed. The fortress-like reinforcements and containments to the cages near the ends crushed the path into a narrow walkway with jagged edges.

The path ended at a small cage. The only sound coming from it was a soft crying sound. Outside it lay the dirty, tainted darkness. Within it darkness remained but somehow different ~ cleaner, pure. The door has no lock from the outside. It is secured instead from within by all sorts of makeshift means. Inside, in the farthest corner, was a small girl. She hid from any visitors and refused to leave the cage. Forever she will be a resident of The Zoo.

Rebecca Walter



Tree Sketches

Sweet Nothings

The way those trees blush
Crimson red ~
I wonder what
The wind has whispered.

Autumn Splendor

Ruby, amber, and orange flames
Ablaze
Against the smooth, cool sky
Of peacock blue.

Acorn Tops

The nut of the oak tree
Wears a petite brown beret.

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Winter Floral

Glistening glazed needles
Of the cool green pine-boughs:
Ice-flowers shimmer.

Victory

The tree reaches upward
To caress the sky.
It breathes celestial vapor,
It rejoices in the lambent sun.
The tree has triumphed
Over gravity.

Karen Schramm

A lady was out one day
Shopping for her garden
She was wondering what to get
Found a clerk, and begged his pardon.

She was holding a tiny plant
In a tiny little pot
And the clerk said to her,
"That's a rhododendron you've got."

The lady said "Oh really,
Now that's very nice,
Can you tell me how it grows,
And tell me what's the price?"

He said to the lady
"It grows three or four feet,
And gets purple flowers.
The plant is really neat."

She put the plant in her trunk
And went on her merry way
She was thinking about where to put it
Up into her driveway.

She was pulling into her garage
When she saw the perfect spot
A little bare spot under the window
Now that was the perfect plot.

She put that tiny plant
Under the window pane
To think it would stay that small
Was really quite insane.

The time is ten years later
The lady is out again
Out to buy a plant
She went to where she'd been.

She found the same clerk
Not so wet behind the ears
She went running to him
Just about in tears.

"Dear Sir", she said to him
"Last time I was here
You said my plant would get four feet tall
That was just in the first year"

"In this ten year period
The rhodo has done just fine
Too fine I may add
Fifteen feet in that amount of time."

"The little plant under my window
has become a towering giant
Its habit is unruly
And its height is just defiant."

"The window is covered
With leaves and purple flowers
To prune to manageable size
Would take me many hours."

"What you sold me
Was a tiny plant in a tiny pot
Well what I've got now
Why Sir, it's a giant I've got!"

"You should see the room
To which that rhododendron goes
It's so dark and dreary
Into it no one goes."

"It's bad enough the plant's so big
it towers over others
But now it's taking over the yard
And is taking over others."

"Why oh why sir
Didn't you know
Just how far
this plant would grow?"

"It seems that now
This plant must come down
For it has taken over the yard
And is headed for the next town."

"Although I hate to see
That monster get the ax
I need light through the window
And that is just a fact."

"So after I cut the giant
Is there something you can suggest
To plant under the window
That won't tower about the rest?"

"Ma'am," the clerk said,
"I know it's been ten years
And I know my bad information
Has caused you all these tears."

"If there's one thing I've learned
After all this time here
It's just this one tip,
No rhodys under the window my dear."

"I think in your case
Perennials are best
You can keep what you want
And just pull out the rest."

"They come in many colors
And they stay pretty small
They really are no trouble
Really Ma'am, no trouble at all."



A Tale of Summer

So here I am, I thought, on this gray, dreary morning, one year away from being a college graduate and living on sixty dollars a week paid monthly with no clue as to who I really am or where I am going. I pulled on my raincoat and stumbled out of the renovated pig barn I was living in, glancing at the lake in my front yard, normally a wondrous sight but today occupying my thoughts only to the extent of, "God, I hope it doesn't flood my house." Teaching children. What business did I have teaching children when I couldn't even hold my own life together, let alone pass on years of learned wisdom to a bunch of six- and seven-year olds?

Dealing with the dregs of a failed engagement, my fiancé leaving with the words "You're a failure, a disappointment, and not one-third the person you could be and it's over. I'm going to go celebrate now." I took this job and a new lover to keep my sanity, and piece together a year and a half of broken promises, to me and by me. My lover had also left me, conveniently on this week, and for a high school student no less. And the drive, the burning drive in my soul to be someone, to do something important, to be better, and always falling short, failing miserably. Show down at every bend. So I welcomed my old unwelcome friend of depression to my abode like I would an obnoxious in-law, setting my backbone and sucking in my gut to face the job at hand.

74 Speaking of jobs, I have to work this entire weekend for Snobs-R-Us, my cashier job at a retail garden center. The job that I hated would put me through another semester of college while the one I liked would only add to the confusion of my life. I stumbled my way towards the visitor center, sloshing through mud puddles and inhaling the green scent of drizzly rain. So I work this weekend, raising my blood pressure to record levels, while my lover gets to go and play with the new found admiree. Someone who, unlike me, I guess, can afford a driver's license and a little bit of freedom and has a future ahead of her.

Splash. So much for keeping these jeans clean today. The other intern is late. Probably out scraping up another roadkill for her animal skinning project. Just last week we found a nice dead raccoon and brought it back with us. It's in the cooler now, but we actually had to fight over it with some weirdo who pulled up in a jeep to see if we needed him to take it for us. "No, we're fine," we told him, "we're doing an experiment." I could see him wondering just what the hell kind of experiment two youngsters would wish to do with a flattened raccoon. At least he had a good story to bring home to his wife.

Oh great. The office person is in a bad mood. Well there's a surprise. What did I do this time, stick a mailing label on crooked or something? Most likely. The assistant naturalist, in his little Boy Scout uniform, is of course in a flurried panic. You'd think that after years of doing this he'd realize that everything will be set up on time before the kids arrive, and all will be well.

I'm teaching the Lenni-Lenape Indian program today. Two teachers are arguing with the head naturalist because they don't understand their programs. Oh, make something up, I feel like telling them; the kids will appreciate it more than if you give a list of memorized facts. Thank God, the other intern just arrived. She's been fighting with her husband again; I can see the

strained look in her eyes.

We go out on setup, taking a little bit longer because tempers are flying everywhere here today. We get back just in time for the kids to start arriving, driven in by parents furious because it's raining and don't we have indoor programs for their precious children on days like this because, of course, they'll melt in the rain? One little boy was dropped off in a t-shirt and shorts, and is shivering. I run back to my cottage and grab an old sweatshirt for him to wear.

I hope I get the timing right on today's program because last time I ended up in the story circle at the same time as another group and had to keep my kids practicing their Indian walk for ten minutes on a simulated deer hunt while waiting for the other group to finish. Luckily, this is my good group. These kids once watched a great blue heron in complete silence while it swallowed a catfish twice the size of its head. The ordeal took ten minutes, an amazing feat when you consider the attention span of seven-year olds.

Smile. No matter how I'm feeling, or what's on my mind, these kids are counting on me to make their day, or at least two hours of it, interesting. I take them out into the woods to start the Indian program. There isn't as much rain under the trees, and the rising mist is taking form like an ethereal being. We stop and listen to the trees talk for a while, telling their sad stories with the occasionally dripping from the branches that are the healing tears giving life to a new seedling.

We talk of the Indians who lived here, and of their respect for the land, and of what the land looked like back then. We talk of their way of life and how it differed from ours. We talk about the importance of being thankful to the earth for everything we take from it. We play Indian games of skill and chance, skill to become better people and chance to solve debates.

We learn to make trails, and to track animals. We listen to the noises of the forest, lost to so many in today's world of freeways and housing developments and shopping centers. We catch an unhappy bullfrog by the pond, knowing full well, of course, that all of his buddies are laughing their little tail-less frog butts off at him. "Look," they say, bellowing uproariously, "that's the third time Charlie's been caught this month!"

This is the last time I will ever see this group of kids, and I want to leave them with something. On the walk back, I decide to do an improv lesson in ecology, based on today's wanderings and wonderings. We talk again of the difference between the land now and the land when white settlers first arrived in this country. They point out the construction, telephone poles, roads, development, and noise.

"Which do you personally like better?" I ask them.

They think for a moment of their Nintendos and sneakers, homes and parents' cars. They look around at the sunlight finally clearing through the trees, dappling the ground with sparkling jewels of dew, too beautiful and fragile to last more than a few minutes.

"This is better," they say.

"Well, is there anything you, as one person, can do? After all, the Indians lived here 10,000 years without destroying everything, whereas we've been here 400. Do you think we can make a difference for the better?"

"No," a little boy says, "It's probably already too late. Besides, the building people are making money."

I try to think of a response as I look into his eyes, and realize how true his words are without his even realizing. I think of how much more I know of how much is going on in the world than he does, and how often I've felt the same way, just giving up and giving in, especially within the last year. Wandering aimlessly while trying to put a meaning to it all so I had a reason to go on while even my best friends deserted me. Where am I supposed to come up with an answer for him?

Then I thought of a story to tell, the story of the woman who founded the nature center, a woman with seventy years of life and mischief sparkling in her eyes.

"Where we're standing was supposed to be a sports stadium. That wetlands we saw last week was going to be a golf course. Over there would have been a parking lot," I tell them. "Do you know what happened?"

"No, what?" a girl asks.

"One woman, the one who founded this place, decided that these trees, and these plants, and the animals that live here were worth saving. She fought to have this place made into a park instead, and then planted many trees, laid out the trails, and had the place protected so everyone could enjoy it."

There is silence as they ponder this.

A little girl speaks up. I cannot recall her name, but her face is etched in my memory. She has the face of an angel, the kind that lights up rooms with the soft, radiant glow of childhood innocence, the kind often talked about.

She runs over to me, clutches my hand, and looks up at me earnestly. "What's the woman's name?" she asks, and I tell her. Hugging me, she requests, "Will you tell her I said thank you, from me and from God?"

On the walk back, I think about her words, because she hit an essential truth right on the mark. I mean, how often does one get a thank you from a co-worker, let alone from God?

I'm here teaching, I think, because I have a lot to learn. Because hurts can be healed. Because problems work themselves out if given love. Because a child who experiences the wonder of life has a hard time later destroying it. And because, above all, if we learn to remember how to listen, a seven-year old is still young enough to carry a message from God.

For Caroline J. - who remembers how to listen.
May the rest of your years be years of Grace.

Rachael Shenyo

Dawn

All is quiet when I wake,
I walk slowly out the gate,
Nothing stirs in the trees,
Nothing but a faint breeze,
The scent of salt fills the air,
Waves hit the shore without a care,
I walk on bare feet on the sand,
I touch the water with my hand,
I go sit on top of a rock,
And wait for every thing to start to talk,
Then the earth is blessed with light,
All the birds take to flight,
Flocks of them take to the air,
Flying as though they have not a care,
Singing because it is a new day,
Having nothing more to do than play,
Then I think of the time when all is calm,
Nothing stirs before the dawn.

Rachel Stick

I have turned over so many new leaves
That my tree is upside down.
My moon is so new
It is no where to be found.

I deserted my plans.
My plans deserted me.
I am left unsure
Of what I should be.

What I valued so highly,
So long, so much
Shattered in but a moment,
Evades my touch.

78 The one who was my solace,
My northern star,
Fell from my sky.

The roots that were my anchor
That held me firm,
Began to die.

I must wish on new stars.
I must set new seeds.
I will wait for the waxing.
I will fight the weeds.

I will become my own constellation.
I will shine on my own.
I will nourish my seeding self
Till a new tree is grown.

Carrie Preston

What We All See

I had just finished mowing the south side of the property and was on my way home. I was traveling on a path that I have traveled at least a thousand times before. I would occasionally glance from side to side as I slowly made my way back to the farm. Something felt quite different this time; it felt as if I were being watched. I turned about halfway around in my seat and saw seven or eight deer staring at me. This was not an unusual circumstance, but something else was wrong. I stopped the tractor in the middle of the path and climbed down to the ground. I walked around to the back of the tractor and faced the deer. I made a few small steps in their direction and they did not even blink. It seemed that their eyes were fixed near the front of the tractor. I walked around to the front of the tractor and saw what they were so patiently watching. They were watching a small fawn less than a foot from my front tire.

This was an unusual situation because it was the wrong time for a doe to fawn. The tiny fawn did not look more than an hour old. It still seemed damp, cold, and unaware of its surroundings. I quietly turned around and saw the deer still staring at me, just a few feet closer now. I climbed back up on to my tractor and backed down the trail. As I backed by the pack of deer, I could see a look of relief on all of their faces.

What made me stop the tractor at that particular spot? Was it the feeling of being watched or was it something greater? On my way back to the farm I thought a great deal about what happened and what made me stop. I realized that I had become blind to my surroundings, and unaware of what was going on around me.

I set a goal for myself that I would become more aware of the daily happenings on the farm. I now see the rabbits that play in the woods and the underbrush. I see the gophers that race across the fields and then make a dramatic dive into their holes. I see the carp as they swim in the pond and then dart into the darkness. I see this and all of the other movement that happens. I now know that I am not the only one watching them. They are also watching me. We all live and survive off our little farm, and now we are all just a bit closer.

Aaron Soldavin

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